

**A THEORY OF THE ORIGIN
AND DEVELOPMENT OF
THE HEROIC HEXAMETER**

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A Theory of the Origin and Development of the Heroic Hexameter by Fitz Gerald Tisdall

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FITZ GERALD TISDALL

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*own impressions of
Fitz Gerald Tisdall*

A THEORY

OF THE

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ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT

OF THE

HEROIC HEXAMETER,

BY

FITZ GERALD TISDALL, Ph.D.

NEW YORK.

1889.

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PREFACE.

THIS essay is a brief compendium of a large amount of material gathered in support of a theory of the origin and development of the heroic hexameter.

The theory was first enunciated by me in 1882. Its publication at the present time has been occasioned by my observing in a foot-note to Professor Frederic D. Allen's article on "Greek Versification in Inscriptions," that a distinguished scholar, Hermann Usener, in a just published tract, *Altgriechischer Versbau* (Bonn, 1887), was of opinion that the hexameter was composed of two originally independent verse-halves (with *syllaba anceps* and free *anacrusis*).

This is a portion of my own theory. Under the circumstances I felt that it might be proper for me to publish my own views. Absence in Europe last summer, and the nature of my college duties since, have prevented me from doing this sooner. I have not yet been able to obtain Usener's tract.

With the view of condensing, I have refrained (except in one instance) from cumbering the text with references to authorities pro and con, or attempting to make a display of extensive and diversified reading.

If the views now expressed meet acceptance, I shall feel encouraged to express others with reference to other aspects of the Homeric question.

I shall be obliged to those of my colleagues who will kindly furnish me arguments and facts conflicting or coinciding with those herein enunciated.

F. G. T.



INTRODUCTORY.

THE theory suggested itself gradually, in the following way :

I had long observed the greater frequency of the feminine cæsure in Homer, although my old college professor and the old authorities seem to take it for granted that the masculine cæsure was, and ought to be the more frequent one. Finally I made a count. This does not agree with that lately published by some others. [For instance, Munro's Homeric Grammar, followed by Keep's Iliad, makes 356 feminine cæsuras in Iliad A, while I count but 343. Munro makes 247 masculine, while I make 260. There are 8 cæsuras in the fourth foot. Our totals agree $356 + 247 + 8 = 343 + 260 + 8$; but my total, 611, the number of verses in A, counts *every* verse, while Munro states that he counts no verse more than once. Yet a cursory glance shows that at least seven verses are repeated in A; so that Munro's figures are palpably incorrect.] This count was continued in Hesiod. The results showed that the feminine cæsure was the prevalent one.

Another phenomenon could not fail to attract attention, viz.: the frequent occurrence of a trochee in the sixth foot. Gradually the trochaic cæsure and trochaic ending of the verse associated themselves in my mind. Actual count showed the final trochee in Homer and Hesiod almost as frequent as the spondee. "Authority of the poet" seemed no explanation of the phenomenon.

The idea presented itself that both the pauses, cæsural and final, took time from the verse. Strangely enough, no publication recognizes this. If this were the case, the final foot was only an *apparent* spondee and the third foot an *apparent* spondee or dactyl.

The prevalent opinion of the place of the cæsura was not satisfactory to me. It seems to be generally agreed that the cæsura occurs a little before the middle of the verse, in order *not* to divide the verse into two equal parts. It seemed to me that an equal division of the verse was precisely what a composer would aim at. The reason for the place of the cæsura, given hereinafter, seemed to me satisfactory.

The question then arose as to the primitiveness of the meter and the propriety of the claim that the dactyl is the *fundamental* foot.

It is with reluctance that this theory is submitted apart from others more directly bearing on the Homeric question.

FITZ GERALD TISDALL.

NEW YORK, 1889.

I.

THE HEROIC HEXAMETER.

(§1. **A complicated meter.**) While, it has seemed strange to many that the oldest literary works known to the race for over two thousand years should have been poems, yet it is much more remarkable that these poems (Homer, Hesiod) are composed in a meter of a very complicated nature. While speculation has been attracted to the authorship of these poems, and the relative amounts of fact and fiction they contain, it seems to have escaped notice, that the vehicle in which the legends and stories are conveyed is much more wonderful as a product of the human mind than the stories themselves. Furthermore, the meter is a stronger proof of the antiquity of the poems, and still more of epic poetry, than anything in the poems. For, it will hardly be denied, that long previous to Homer and Hesiod, whatever their epochs, the dactylic hexameter must have been perfected and very commonly used in what we call poetry, just as after Homer and Hesiod until the beginning of prose it was used as a common vehicle of serious composition in philosophy and science. Whatever date may be assigned to Homer and Hesiod, a vastly more remote one must be assigned to the origin of the meter.

It is my belief, that the art of poetical composition was one of gradual growth, and advanced in a very long process of evolution from simple to complex meters. In other words, all poetry originated in the simplest metrical forms; probably in *one* simple form. This simple form would be gradually changed in different ways for different purposes, thus by successive differentiations producing all the existing meters. The original, primitive, simplest meter might in course of time become altogether disused. If it were found in existence centuries or thousands of years after its birth, it would probably owe its preservation in the long